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Ad Hoc Committee on a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities
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Progress in the equalization of opportunities by, for and with persons with disabilities

Report of the Secretary-General

Executive summary

General Assembly resolution 52/82 provided a concise set of priorities for action on developmental approaches to the advancement of persons with disabilities in a broad human rights framework. The present report reviews progress in three areas of action at the international, regional and national levels to further equalization of opportunities by, for and with persons with disabilities: (a) progress in international norms and standards from the disability perspective, (b) progress in improving data and statistics related to disability, and (c) progress in building national capacities and institutions from the disability perspective. It also considers regional initiatives to promote mainstream approaches to the equalization of opportunities.

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I. Progress in international norms and standards from the disability perspective

A. United Nations Millennium Declaration

1. The Millennium Assembly of the United Nations, which was held from 6 to 8 September 2000, in the Millennium Report of the Secretary-General, entitled "We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century" (A/54/2000), considered fundamental issues, trends and values deemed essential to international relations in the twenty-first century. The United Nations Millennium Declaration (General Assembly resolution 55/2) identified priorities for translating shared values into practical action. The eight Millennium Development Goals identified in the Declaration comprise a set of time-bound and measurable targets, ranging from halving extreme poverty and halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education by 2015. From a disability perspective, the Millennium Report and Declaration provide important guidance for policy formulation, evaluation and planning priorities, although neither document makes specific reference to the advancement of persons with disabilities, either in the context of development or as an issue of social welfare and services.

B. Outcomes of major United Nations conferences, summits and special sessions of the General Assembly

2. Following the Millennium Assembly, the United Nations held two special sessions of the General Assembly, on HIV/AIDS and on children, respectively, and has organized five conferences on international development, human security and human rights. Although only some of the outcome documents address specifically the situation of persons with disabilities, the outcome documents provide critical policy inputs to development approaches to the advancement of persons with disabilities.

1. Special sessions of the General Assembly

3. At its twenty-sixth special session (New York, 25-27 June 2001), the General Assembly considered the global HIV/AIDS pandemic and adopted the Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS (resolution S/26-2, annex). The outcome document does not specifically address persons with disabilities, although persons infected by HIV/AIDS are covered by disability legislation in several countries. The Declaration of Commitment provides guidance on a number of critical policy issues and outlines action on several programme issues of concern to all: leadership to address the HIV/AIDS pandemic; prevention, care and treatment; human rights; social and economic aspects; and research and development.

4. At its twenty-seventh special session (New York, 8-10 May 2002), the General Assembly considered progress made for the benefit of children in the decade since the 1990 World Summit for Children and the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action for its implementation in the 1990s (see A/45/625, annex). The outcome document adopted at the special session, entitled "A world fit for children" (resolution S-27/2, annex) contains a Declaration and a Plan of Action, which aim to strengthen international

cooperation to promote the rights of children in the twenty-first century. The Declaration acknowledges the international legal standards for the protection and well-being of children contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (resolution 44/25, annex) and its optional protocols (resolution 54/263, annexes I and II) and sets forth 10 principles for making a world fit for children, which, if implemented, would contribute to advancement of children with disabilities in the mainstream. The Plan of Action addresses the situation of children with disabilities as this relates to their full and equal enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms (para. 21), promoting healthy lives (para. 37, item 17) and quality education (para. 40, item 4).

2. United Nations conferences and summits

5. The United Nations Conference on the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All Its Aspects (New York, 9-20 July 2001) adopted a programme of action (see A/CONF.192/15) to combat and eradicate illicit small arms and light weapons. The programme of action proposes a range of policy and programmatic undertakings at the national, regional and international levels. Since war and conflict, as well as violence in society, are recognized causes of disablement, progress in implementing the programme of action would contribute to a reduction of one of the significant causes of disability in populations.

6. The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, 31 August-8 September 2001) considered a world vision and international cooperation to fight against racism in the twenty-first century. The Conference outcome — the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action — includes among its strategies to achieve full and effective equality a proposal which invites the General Assembly to consider elaborating an integral and comprehensive international convention to protect and promote the rights and dignity of disabled people (para. 180).

7. The International Conference on Financing for Development (Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002) was the first United Nations conference to address financial and development issues. The Conference also involved the first quadripartite exchange of views between Governments, civil society, the business community and institutional stakeholders on global economic issues. The Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development[1] presents a number of leading actions to support development, including mobilizing resources for development, trade, financial and technical cooperation, debt and systemic issues. Although the outcome document does not specifically address the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of development, it does provide critical guidance on the importance of policy commitments to mainstreaming and equity, including gender equity, respect for human rights and investments in people — in both economic and social infrastructure and social services and social protection — as important factors in the common pursuit of growth, poverty eradication and sustainable development. Those are essential preconditions to development approaches to the advancement of persons with disabilities.

8. The Second World Assembly on Ageing (Madrid, 8-12 April 2002) considered opportunities and challenges of population ageing in the twenty-first century and measures to promote the development of a society for all ages. The outcome document, the Political Declaration and Madrid International Plan of Action on

Ageing, 2002,[2] notes an unprecedented increase in persons aged 60 and over, from 600 million to an estimated 2 billion in 2050, which will be greatest and most rapid in developing countries. It may be recalled that the third review and appraisal of the World Programme of Action concerning Disabled Persons noted that, as populations age, there is an observed decline in motor and sensory abilities but that those are not necessary conditions to include older persons as members of the set of persons with a disability. Population ageing introduces policy considerations related to furthering environmental accessibility for all, planning and delivering appropriate social services and safety nets, and promoting opportunities for sustainable livelihoods to provide conditions for independent living in non-institutional settings (see A/52/351, para. 59). Priority direction II (Advancing health and well-being in old age) of the Madrid Plan of Action considers "older persons and disability" as a specific issue for policy concern and sets forth an objective of promoting the maintenance of maximum functional capacity throughout the life course and promotion of full participation of older persons with disabilities (paras. 87-90).

9. The World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 26 August-4 September 2002) considered issues and trends related to poverty eradication, changing consumption and production patterns, and protection and management of the natural resource base for economic and social development and their implications for sustainable development of current and future generations, cognizant of the need for human dignity for all. The Summit outcome — the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development[3] — considers the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of "health and sustainable development" (chap. VI); the Plan identifies persons with disabilities as members of a vulnerable group of society, who require protection from debilitating diseases and special care from the causes of ill health, including environmental causes (para. 53).

3. High-level segment of the substantive session of 2002 of the Economic and Social Council

10. At the high-level segment of its substantive session of 2002, the Economic and Social Council considered the theme "The contribution of human resources development, including the areas of health and education, to the process of development". The themes are important from the disability perspective since health is a precondition for equal participation of persons with disabilities, as presented in rules 2 (Medical care), 3 (Rehabilitation) and 4 (Support services) of the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (resolution 48/96, annex), and education is a target area for equal participation (rule 6). However, the ministerial declaration adopted by the Council in 2002 made no reference to the situation of persons with disabilities in the context of development or with reference to education and training, health care or access to modern communications and information technologies.

C. Proposal to elaborate a comprehensive and integral convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities

11. As noted above, the General Assembly considered proposals to elaborate a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities at its forty-second (1987) and

forty-fourth (1989) sessions, but decided that the issue required further study. Building on the findings and recommendations of the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, President Vicente Fox of Mexico outlined the proposal of Mexico on the elaboration of a comprehensive and integral convention on the rights of persons with disabilities in his address at the general debate of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. In his statement, President Fox called upon the international community to combat poverty and social exclusion. He observed that as societies addressed issues related to the creation and distribution of opportunities of global development, it was important that all citizens be involved as stakeholders; the world would not become more just if certain groups were excluded from that process. Mexico presented for the consideration of the fifty-sixth session of the Assembly a proposal to establish a special committee to study the question of a new international convention on promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities, which was endorsed by the Assembly in its resolution 56/168.

12. The first session of the Ad Hoc Committee established pursuant to Assembly resolution 56/168 met from 29 July to 9 August 2002 at United Nations Headquarters, under the chairmanship of Ambassador Luís Gallegos, Permanent Representative of Ecuador to the United Nations. In its recommendations, the Ad Hoc Committee directed special attention to promoting accessibility to United Nations facilities, technologies and documents, and invited persons with disabilities and experts to present proposals in that regard. The report of the Ad Hoc Committee (A/57/357) contained a draft resolution on its future work for adoption by the fifty-seventh session of the General Assembly.

II. Activities of the Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development, 1994-2002

13. The Secretary-General appointed Bengt Lindqvist (Sweden) as Special Rapporteur on disability of the Commission for Social Development in 1994, initially for a period of three years; his mandate was twice renewed by resolutions of the Economic and Social Council, in 1997[4] and in 2000,[5] respectively. The reports of the Special Rapporteur present his findings on the promotion and monitoring of the implementation of the Standard Rules and, as requested by the Commission, outline his views, on their further development.

14. Mr. Lindqvist submitted the report on his first mandate (A/52/56, annex) to both the thirty-fifth session of the Commission for Social Development and the fifty-second session of the General Assembly. The first monitoring report included results of questionnaires that had been circulated to Governments and non-governmental organizations in the disability field to review and assess the implementation of the Standard Rules. Eighty-three Governments submitted replies, together with 163 non-governmental organizations. A majority of Governments (84 per cent) reported the existence of a national disability policy or similar instrument, which is a precondition for the equalization of opportunities. The reports described the contribution of the Standard Rules to governmental action to promote the equalization of opportunities; 81 per cent of Governments commented on the use of the Standard Rules in public awareness and information campaigns on the rights of persons with disabilities. The first monitoring report found less progress with regard

to implementation of the target areas for equal participation (rules 5 to 12), which suggested the tendency of focusing more on processes than outcomes in the period immediately following the adoption of the Standard Rules in late 1993 by the General Assembly.

15. The first monitoring report provided important benchmarks on measures to promote equalization of opportunities in terms of findings, based on empirical data, and recommendations on priority actions. In particular:

(a) The report noted that disability was not considered among mainstream technical cooperation issues. It recommended that funds and programmes, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and international financial institutions, such as the World Bank, strengthen and integrate disability measures in mainstream development cooperation activities (A/52/56, annex, para. 135);

(b) In the area of education, the report urged that Governments that had not already done so provide appropriate education for children and adults with special educational needs, as recommended in the Salamanca statement and framework for action (A/52/56, annex, paras. 138-139);

(c) In the field of employment, the report urged that Governments that had not already done so ratify and comply with International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention No. 159 on vocational rehabilitation and employment (disabled persons) to support the creation of new and expanded employment opportunities for persons with disabilities in the mainstream (A/52/56, annex, paras. 140-142);

(d) The report noted that accessibility, in both the physical environment and information and communications technologies, was an emerging — and critical — cross-cutting issue in the promotion of the equalization of opportunities. All Governments were urged to adopt appropriate policies and develop accessibility measures (A/52/56, annex, paras. 143-145);

(e) The report noted the positive contributions by organizations of persons with disabilities to promoting the equalization of opportunities, and Governments were urged to develop further patterns of cooperation at all levels (A/52/56, annex, paras. 146-147);

(f) The report noted an observed weakness in the handling of disability matters at governmental levels due to the lack of common monitoring and evaluation procedures, and the United Nations was urged to assist (on request) Governments in building up their own monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (A/52/56, annex, para. 149);

(g) The report noted certain shortcomings in the Standard Rules: they were non-binding and Governments were not obliged to provide information for monitoring by the United Nations, and they were vague with regard to children with disabilities, the gender aspects of disability and accessible housing and shelter (A/52/56, annex, paras. 151-152).

16. The second monitoring report of the Special Rapporteur (E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1, annex), covering the period 1997 to 1999, was considered at the thirty-eighth session of the Commission for Social Development. It contained the preliminary results of a global survey on progress in implementing the preconditions for equal participation (rules 1-4) and personnel training (rule 19), discussed progress related

to human rights and persons with disabilities, and submitted proposals on further developing and complementing the Standard Rules.

17. The survey was carried out in cooperation with the World Health Organization (WHO) since three of the four preconditions related to areas of its substantive competence, i.e., rules 2 (Medical care), 3 (Rehabilitation) and 4 (Support services). The questionnaire was circulated to all 191 WHO member States in April 1999, and 104 Governments had submitted replies as at late 1999. Preliminary analyses of the data indicated that a majority of Governments had reported on the provision of medical services to persons with disabilities (99 of 104), rehabilitation services (73 of 102) and support services, including assistive devices and equipment (87 of 96). The data indicated that most countries had implemented community-based approaches or similar decentralization of the provision of rehabilitation services. A majority of replies submitted (59 of 104) reported that organizations of persons with disabilities were sometimes involved in the planning and evaluation of medical care. Since the participation of persons with disabilities in decisions that affected their welfare and well-being was a central concern of the Standard Rules, the second report urged Governments to strengthen measures to involve persons with disabilities and their organizations in the planning and evaluation of medical care and services (E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1, annex, para. 140).

18. The second report documented progress in the area of human rights and disability, in the light of resolution 1998/3 of the Commission on Human Rights.[6] In that resolution, the Commission recognized United Nations responsibilities for human rights and persons with disabilities; in particular, the Commission: (a) recognized the Standard Rules as an evaluative instrument when assessing the degree of compliance with human rights standards concerning persons with disabilities; (b) encouraged treaty bodies to monitor the compliance of States with their commitments to ensure the full enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities; (c) invited special rapporteurs, in carrying out their mandates, to take into account the situation and human rights of persons with disabilities. The Commission urged Governments to implement the Standard Rules that particularly concerned women, children and persons with developmental and psychiatric disabilities to protect their human dignity and integrity.

19. In its examination of options for the way ahead in promoting the rights to persons with disabilities, the report noted that countries were using the Standard Rules as a frame of reference for disability-sensitive policies, plans and programmes but that there were both shortcomings and gaps in them which had been considered in the first monitoring report (A/52/56, annex). One approach to addressing new issues and dealing with topics not currently considered in the Standard Rules could be elaboration of a special convention, which begged the question of the level of specification that would be chosen in such a convention (E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1, annex, paras. 156-159). Chief among issues identified to improve monitoring of the Standard Rules was the need for disability to be monitored from both a human rights and a social development perspective (E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1, annex, paras. 160-163). Promotion of the Standard Rules would also benefit from improved coordination and information exchange, involving both country-level and international action among United Nations bodies and other international organizations; such mechanisms should include forms for cooperation with international non-governmental organizations in the disability field (E/CN.5/2000/3 and Corr.1, annex, para. 164).

20. The third monitoring report of the Special Rapporteur (E/CN.5/2002/4) directed special attention to future issues: (a) options to complement and develop further the Standard Rules, which were presented in an annex to the report (E/CN.5/2002/4, annex); (b) human rights and disability, in the light of Commission on Human Rights resolution 2000/51,[7] in which the Commission had invited the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, in cooperation with the Special Rapporteur on disability, to examine measures to protect and monitor the rights of persons with disabilities; and (c) future monitoring mechanisms.

21. In his discussion on human rights and disability, Mr. Lindqvist noted that general comment No. 5 of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights[8] had analysed disability as a human rights issue and provided that persons with disabilities were entitled to the full range of rights recognized in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The question of human rights and disability could thus be characterized as an issue of approaches to follow to strengthen and improve the disability dimension in human rights monitoring and protection. The principles of full participation and inclusion, which were prominent concepts of contemporary disability policy, suggested that effective monitoring of the human rights of persons with disabilities was best accomplished as an integral part of existing monitoring mechanisms. Mr. Lindqvist added that in the disability field, the Standard Rules were widely recognized and had proved to be useful in the development of national policies and legislation. They could support the monitoring of human rights in the regular United Nations treaty monitoring systems and serve as a reference when various provisions of existing conventions were applied on the basis of disability needs.

22. Mr. Lindqvist also observed that in the period since the adoption of Commission resolution 2000/51, the question of a special convention on the rights of persons with disabilities had been actively discussed by a number of non-governmental organizations in the disability field. Several issues had been raised in those discussions, including (a) the contribution of a legally binding instrument on human rights and disability to achieving a higher priority for disability needs at national level, and (b) the inclusion of human rights of persons with disabilities as an integral part of regular United Nations treaty monitoring mechanisms and not simply as a matter of social or medical concern. Mr. Lindqvist noted that during the second half of 2001, the Government of Mexico had raised the question of elaborating a comprehensive and integrated convention on the rights of persons with disabilities at both the Durban Conference and the general debate of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly. The value proposition of the initiative of Mexico is the promotion and protection of the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities in the context of development. Mexico had proposed that the Assembly establish an Ad Hoc Committee open to the participation of all Member States to consider proposals on the elaboration of a comprehensive and integral convention, which was endorsed by the Assembly in its resolution 56/168 of 19 December 2001. Mr. Lindqvist observed that the process of elaborating a convention had begun, which begged several questions (E/CN.5/2002/4, para. 72):

(a) What areas should a future convention cover?

(b) What relation should it (a future convention) have to existing general conventions?

(c) Should it (a future convention) be expressed as a set of principles, general in nature but possible to apply in a variety of national situations around the world?

(d) Should the main perspective (of a future convention) be based on the needs in developing countries?

(e) Should this future convention replace the Standard Rules, or should the Standard Rules and the convention complement each other?

23. The Special Rapporteur expressed the view that a twin-track approach might be the best way to elaborate a convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, i.e., continued development of the disability dimension in the existing United Nations human rights monitoring system while proceeding with the elaboration of a comprehensive and integral convention on the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities.

24. The Commission for Social Development decided to consider at its forty-second session (see Economic and Social Council resolution 2002/26, para. 12) the views of member States on the proposed supplement to the Standard Rules contained in the annex to the third monitoring report of the Special Rapporteur on disability (E/CN.5/2002/4).

25. Monitoring the Standard Rules involves two functions: assessment and promotion. During the first three mandates, both functions had been carried out; the findings of the quinquennial reviews of the Programme of Action had complemented the Standard Rules monitoring mechanism. Mr. Lindqvist expressed the view that the promotional function would require the appointment of a Special Rapporteur for a further mandate to carry out the tasks presented in chapter IV (Monitoring mechanism) of the Standard Rules. The complementary monitoring and evaluation processes, for the Programme of Action and the Standard Rules, respectively, should be merged into a periodic exercise. Finally, the advisory panel of experts (see General Assembly resolution 48/96, annex, sect. IV, para. 3) to the Special Rapporteur, comprised of representatives of major non-governmental organizations in the field of disability, had provided critical inputs to the monitoring and promotional activities of the Special Rapporteur, and that body should be maintained in the future. One prerequisite of an effective monitoring mechanism was sufficient funds, regular or extrabudgetary, to support the mandated monitoring functions.

III. Progress in data and statistics on disability

26. In its resolution 52/82, the General Assembly urged Governments to cooperate with the United Nations Statistics Division in the continued development of global statistics and indicators on disability. In response to that guidance, the activities of the Division have focused on methodological work, national capacity-building, and the collection and dissemination of data on disability.

A. Methodological work

27. During the period under review, the Division prepared and published the *Guidelines and Principles for the Development of Disability Statistics*.[9] The

publication provides practical guidance and principles on the collection of disability data through both surveys and censuses, and on the compilation, dissemination and usage of data and information on disability. The *Guidelines* build on the *Manual for the Development of Statistical Information for Disability Programmes and Policies*,[10] and the section on disability characteristics contained in the *Principles and Recommendations for Population and Housing Censuses, Revision 1*.[11] The *Guidelines* recommend that the measurement of disability be carried out within the conceptual framework of the WHO *International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*.[12] The ICF conceptual framework[13] provides standardized concepts and terminology that can be used in disability measurement, which can contribute to improved comparability of data at the national and international levels.

28. Following the finalization of the *Guidelines*, the Division began to organize regional training workshops on disability statistics for national statistical officers and data users from relevant governmental ministries. The first workshop, on disability statistics for Africa, was held in Kampala from 10 to 14 September 2001. In collaboration with the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the Division organized a meeting on disability measurement for ESCWA countries in Cairo from 1 to 5 June 2002.

B. Measurement of disability

29. The measurement of disability for statistical reporting was considered by an international seminar on the measurement of disability (New York, 4-6 June 2001), which was organized by the Division, in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of the United States. Seminar participants reviewed and assessed the current status of methods used in population-based data-collection activities to measure disability in national statistical systems, and agreed to establish the Washington Group on Disability Measurement to implement seminar recommendations on further work to improve the measurement of disability.

30. City groups, a United Nations Statistics Division innovation,[14] are comprised of representatives, in their individual capacity, mainly from national statistical agencies that meet informally to address selected problems in statistical methods. The objectives of the Washington Group are (a) to guide the development of a small set(s) of general disability measures, suitable for use in censuses, sample-based national surveys or other statistical formats, which will provide basic necessary information on disability throughout the world; (b) to recommend one or more extended sets of survey items to measure disability or principles for their design, to be used as components of population surveys or as supplements to specialty surveys; and (c) to address the methodological issues associated with the measurement of disability considered most pressing by Washington Group participants. The first meeting, hosted by the National Center for Health Statistics of CDC, was held in Washington, D.C., from 18 to 20 February 2002, and considered various methodological issues in disability measurement, including purposes of measurement; examination of the ICF model; United Nations standard disability tables; global measures of disability; the relationship of global measures to ICF; the confounding function of assistive device use; cultural practices that influence the

nature of the environment or proscribe participation; and cultural issues that act as barriers to collecting data and cross-national comparability of information. The next meeting is scheduled for January 2003 in Ottawa.

C. Collection, dissemination and use of data on disability

31. The Programme of Action, in paragraph 198, requested the United Nations to develop systems for the regular collection and dissemination of data and statistics on disability. To that end, the web site of the Division includes a disability statistics portal,[15] which provides a guide to available national sources of data and online technical references.

32. With a view to building capacities for the analysis of data and statistics on disability in policy analyses and evaluations, the Division for Social Policy and Development of the United Nations Secretariat, with the participation of the Statistics Division, organized an expert meeting on disability sensitive evaluation and monitoring (New York, 3-5 December 2001) to review and discuss options to improve the organization and presentation of data and statistics in the formulation, monitoring and evaluation of policies, plans and programmes from the disability perspective. Meeting participants recommended that if all persons were to be able to exercise their human rights in the context of development, access to societal institutions must be systematically appraised. Participants examined seven dimensions of accessibility in the environment, which had been presented in the third review and appraisal of the Programme of Action (A/52/351):[16]

(a) Orientation (who): do you have information you wish?

(b) Independence (what): do you choose what you wish to do?

(c) Mobility (where): do you go where you wish?

(d) Occupation of time (when): do you engage when you wish?

(e) Social integration (with whom): are you accepted by others?

(f) Economic self-sufficiency (with what): do you have the resources you need?

(g) Transition (change): are you prepared for change?

33. Meeting participants expressed the view that the seven dimensions were useful in assessing whether opportunities had been equalized in policies, plans and programmes. Systematic appraisal of the seven dimensions of access would cover interactions between people and their environments that must be assessed and compared to reduce all forms of social exclusion to ensure human rights for all, based on the principles of universal design. The situation of persons with disabilities could be monitored along the seven dimensions to assess whether they had been excluded or had been assured their human rights and had benefited from economic and social development. Systematic appraisal of environmental accessibility represented a prerequisite in promoting the human rights for all in the context of development.

IV. Progress in building national capacities for the equalization of opportunities

34. In its resolution 52/82, the General Assembly directed special attention to building national capacities to further implement the Standard Rules and to address the policy issues identified to promote the equalization of opportunities, i.e., accessibility; social services and social safety nets; and employment and sustainable livelihoods. In his progress report on the implementation of the Programme of Action (A/54/388 and Add.1), the Secretary-General discussed progress and achievements in building capacities in each of the priority areas and in support of the Standard Rules.[17] The report reviewed nearly two decades of cooperation with the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND), under the distinguished leadership of Prince Talal Bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, in support of the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action. The Secretary-General noted the significant difference of the cooperation with AGFUND and its generous support for catalytic and innovative action, particularly as concerning advancement and empowerment of women and children with disabilities in mainstream development.

35. The Secretary-General also raised the question of options for the way ahead with regard to disability-sensitive development cooperation in the new century. In a situation of generally declining resources for operational activities for development, the exiguous resources of the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability[18] had assumed great importance. Although the Fund was only one of the resources available to Governments to build national capacities in the field of disability, the unique value proposition of the Fund derived from its link to the Programme of Action and its focus on developmental approaches to the advancement of persons with disabilities on the basis of full participation and equality. Operationally, the value proposition of the Fund had three distinguishing characteristics: (a) to focus on catalytic and innovative action for equalization of opportunities by, for and with persons with disabilities; (b) to focus on "open approaches" and beneficiary involvement in the determination and provision of advice, assistance and referrals on request; and (c) to focus on initiatives that contributed to "an architecture of the possibilities of human beings".[19] The annexes to document A/54/388/Add.1 documented ways in which the constituency-focused strategy of the Fund had contributed to initiatives of Governments, often in cooperation with the non-governmental community, in the equalization of opportunities, and had resulted in the establishment of partnerships at all levels to support implementation of the Programme of Action and the Standard Rules. The challenge for the new century was to better incorporate the disability dimension in mainstream technical cooperation activities and not to address the question as a matter of the social welfare and health services sectors.

36. In the biennium 2000-2001, an additional set of resources became available to support building national capacities for equalization of opportunities. As part of his programme of reform, the Secretary-General had proposed the establishment of a development account, to be based on savings from planned efficiency measures (see A/51/950, paras. 234-235, actions 21 and 22), whose resources would, inter alia, assist developing countries in implementing global programmes and outcomes of United Nations conferences (see A/51/950/Add.5). By resolutions 54/249 and 54/250, the General Assembly approved an appropriation of US$ 13,065,000 under

section 33 (Development account) for the biennium 2000-2001 to fund 16 projects in the economic and social sectors, including the project entitled "Capacity-building and institutional development for equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities (00/01H)". As discussed in his report on the implementation of the Programme of Action (A/56/169 and Corr.1), resources allocated to project 00/01H had contributed to expanded cooperation within the United Nations system in support of the priorities identified in Assembly resolution 52/82 on furthering equalization of opportunities for all. Development account support had led to innovative technical exchanges and capacity-building efforts related to accessible tourism in Asia and the Pacific, in cooperation with the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and accessible urban environments in Western Asia, in cooperation with ESCWA. Recent action supported with the resources of project 00/01H focused on the priority issues of (a) sustainable livelihoods, in cooperation with the UNDP Jakarta field office and the Government of Indonesia, and (b) norms and standards relating to disability, in cooperation with ESCAP, in which the focus was on leadership training for women with disabilities, and with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in connection with a regional leadership training on the Standard Rules, hosted by the Government of the Republic of Colombia, and an interregional expert meeting on international norms and standards related to disability, hosted by the Government of Mexico. One lesson in implementing assistance provided under the Development Account is the need for full and effective involvement of local partners, both implementing and cooperating agents, in the light of the financial rules and regulations of the Organization that concern this activity: Development Account resources are derived from the regular budget and not from voluntary contributions. Capacity-building initiatives supported by Development Account resources are quick to implement once procedural and financial conditions are met; for the end user, the source of funds is neutral. Since activities supported by the Development Account relate to priorities of the Organization in the economic and social field, Development Account assistance contributes to mainstreaming of the disability perspective.

V. Regional cooperation for the equalization of opportunities

A. Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002)

37. The experience of the Asian and Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002) provides important lessons in regional cooperation to promote equalization of opportunities. ESCAP resolution 48/3 proclaimed the Decade, with the goals of achieving full participation and equality of people with disabilities. The proclamation and agenda for action of the Decade set forth policy guidelines for achieving the goals of the Decade and outlined 12 areas of policy concern: national coordination, legislation, information, public awareness, accessibility and communication, education, training and employment, prevention of causes of disability, rehabilitation services, assistive devices, self-help organizations and regional cooperation. ESCAP organized in June 1995 a regional technical meeting to review progress in implementing the Decade and to set targets and recommendations to implement the agenda for action, including recommendations on the inclusion of the gender dimension in Decade-related action. In 1997, at the mid-point of the

Decade, ESCAP organized, in cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Korea, a meeting of senior officials to mark the mid-point of the Decade (Seoul, 26-29 September 1997), consider progress in meeting the Decade goals of full participation and equality of people with disabilities and provide guidance for action for the second half of the Decade. The Seoul proposals for the second half of the Decade were endorsed in ESCAP resolution 54/1. Proposals for further strengthening Decade targets were considered by the Commission at its fifty-sixth session, when it endorsed a total of 107 Decade targets for action by 2002 (see E/ESCAP/1173). By July 2002, ESCAP reported that 41 of 57 ESCAP members and associate members had signed the proclamation on full participation and equality of people with disabilities in the Asian and Pacific region.

38. The data available (see E/ESCAP/APDDP/1) indicate that the Decade has achieved a great deal. It has obtained wide support among Governments and the non-governmental community. One factor contributing to its success has been the biennial consideration by ESCAP of progress in and obstacles to the implementation of the agenda for action. Target-setting at both technical and intergovernmental levels provided opportunities to address new and emerging issues and to build consensus for action. While ESCAP data suggest that the goals of the Decade, full participation and equality of persons with disabilities, have not been met, there has been progress on a broad disability agenda: efforts in mainstreaming disability issues in development; upholding the rights of persons with disabilities by means of enforceable measures; increasing attention to environmental accessibility, universal design and inclusive education; beneficiary involvement in services planning and provision; and integrated training and employment promotion schemes. Since poverty and hunger demand urgent attention, the link between poverty, disabilit and unmet needs of persons with disabilities, especially in rural areas, is no recognized as integral to addressing that priority concern.

39. The Decade will end in December 2002. In its resolution 58/4, the Commission proclaimed the extension of the Decade for a second decade, 2003-2012. A high-level intergovernmental meeting to conclude the Decade (Otsu City, Shiga, Japan, 25-28 October 2002) considered a regional framework for action by Governments and concerned stakeholders in the region to achieve an inclusive, barrier-free and rights-based society for persons with disabilities in the new decade, 2003-2012. The regional framework for action identified the following areas for priority action in the new Decade: (a) self-help organizations of persons with disabilities; (b) women with disabilities; (c) early intervention and education; (d) training and employment, including self-employment; (e) access to built environments and public transport; (f) access to information and communications, including information communications technology; and (g) poverty alleviation through social security and sustainable livelihoods. The regional framework for action incorporated the Millennium Development Goals and their relevant targets with a view to ensuring that issues and concerns related to persons with disabilities were integral to efforts to achieve the Goals.

B. African Decade of Disabled Persons (2000-2009)

40. The African Decade of Disabled People is an initiative of the non-governmental community of Africa, in cooperation with member States and Governments of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), to further equalization of

opportunities of persons with disabilities. The decision to proclaim the Decade is the result of a recommendation made by the Labour and Social Affairs Commission of OAU during its twenty-second session, held at Windhoek from 19 to 24 April 1999, which was adopted at an OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government meeting held in Algiers (12-14 July 1999). The period 2000 to 2009 was formally proclaimed the African Decade of Disabled Persons at the seventy-second ordinary session of the OAU Council of Ministers and thirty-sixth Assembly of the Heads of State and Government, respectively, held in Lomé from 10 to 12 July 2000, with the goals of promoting awareness and commitment to full participation, equality and empowerment of persons with disabilities in Africa. Following the proclamation of the Decade by OAU (now the African Union), responsibility for organizing the Decade was given to the African Rehabilitation Institute (ARI), an OAU regional institution headquartered in Harare, with subregional offices in Dakar (for West Africa), Brazzaville (for Central Africa) and Harare (for Southern Africa). ARI shares that responsibility and collaborates in the planning of the Decade with the non-governmental Pan African Federation of Disabled Persons (PAFOD), the African Union of the Blind (AFUB) and other regional organizations of persons with disabilities.

41. In paragraph 14 of its resolution 2000/10, the Economic and Social Council encouraged international support for the Decade to promote equalization of opportunities and to promote and protect the human rights of persons with disabilities.

42. From 4 to 7 February 2002, OAU organized at Addis Ababa, in collaboration with ARI, PAFOD, AFUB and other regional organizations of persons with disabilities, a pan-African conference on the Decade to consider a plan of action for the Decade.[20] The aim of the action plan is to provide guidance to member States and Governments of OAU to further the goals of full participation, equality and empowerment of people with disabilities in Africa. Throughout the plan, the terms "people with disabilities", "disabled persons" and "disabled people" are used interchangeably, reflecting accepted usage in different countries. The draft plan was adopted by conference participants on 7 February 2002 and transmitted for consideration of the OAU Labour and Social Affairs Commission at its twenty-fifth session, held in Ouagadougou (16-21 April 2002). The action plan was formally endorsed by the OAU Council of Ministers in its decision CM/DEC.676 (LXXVI).

43. The action plan calls upon OAU member States and Governments to study the situation of persons with disabilities with a view to formulating measures favouring the equalization of opportunities, full participation and their independence in society. Member States and Governments are urged:

(a) To formulate or reformulate policies and national programmes that encourage the full participation of persons with disabilities in social and economic development;

(b) To create or reinforce national disability coordination committees, and ensure effective representation of disabled persons and their organizations;

(c) To support community-based service delivery, in collaboration with international development agencies and organizations;

(d) To promote more efforts that encourage positive attitudes towards children, youth, women and adults with disabilities, and the implementation of

measures to ensure their access to rehabilitation, education, training and employment, as well as to cultural and sports activities and access to the physical environment;

(e) To develop programmes that alleviate poverty among disabled people and their families;

(f) To put in place programmes that create greater awareness and conscientiousness of communities and Governments relating to disability;

(g) To prevent disability by promoting peace and paying attention to other causes of disability;

(h) To mainstream disability on the social, economic and political agendas of African Governments;

(i) To spearhead the implementation of the Standard Rules and ensure their use as a basis for policy and legislation to protect the interests of disabled people in Africa;

(j) To apply all United Nations and OAU human rights instruments to promote and monitor the rights of persons with disabilities.

44. The action plan states that the goal and objectives of the Decade will be implemented by Governments, in partnership with organizations of persons with disabilities; international organizations, including the United Nations and its specialized agencies; the African Union and its specialized agencies; social partnerships (organizations of employers and workers); and non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations.[21] The Decade is recognized as a subprogramme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) (see A/57/304, annex), whose basic goals include promoting accelerated growth and sustainable development and eradication of widespread and severe poverty.

C. Arab Decade of Disabled Persons

45. The question of proclaiming the period 2003 to 2012 as the Arab Decade of Disabled Persons was considered by a meeting hosted by ESCWA in Beirut from 2 to 5 October 2002. The conference, on the theme "Disability conditions in the Arab world: towards an Arab decade on disability", was organized by the League of Arab States and the Arab Organization of Disabled People, in collaboration with the Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon, ESCWA, and local, regional and international organizations concerned with disability. More than 250 people attended the conference, which included Arab ministers, officials from 18 Arab countries, experts, diplomatic representatives and representatives of non-governmental organizations. Conference deliberations focused on the 10 main objectives identified for the Decade: education; health; legislation; rehabilitation and employment; the disabled woman; the disabled child; accessibility and transport; globalization, poverty and disability; information and awareness; recreation and sports. Plenary and workshop sessions identified recommendations that were unanimously adopted at the closing session, which, along with a declaration on the Decade, will be presented to the League of Arab States and the Arab Ministers of Social Affairs for adoption and proclamation at the forthcoming Arab Summit. Proclamation of the Decade and its translation into a comprehensive plan of action would provide

western Asia with a framework to promote cooperation and action to ensure that Arab persons with disabilities would be more fully integrated into society and could take charge of their lives.

D. Latin America and the Caribbean

46. The data available suggest that Governments and civil society organizations are effectively using information technologies to promote and develop networks for promoting awareness and cooperation related to equalization of opportunities for persons with disabilities. Following the conclusion of the first Latin American seminar on Internet accessibility (Mexico City, 4-7 June 2000), meeting participants established the Red LatinoAmericana, which is hosted by the Fundación Mexicana de Integración Social and the Organización Internacional Vida Independiente para Personas con Discapacidad (non-governmental organizations). The *Red* is an Internet-based forum for the exchange of knowledge and experience and planning, and the organization of technical meetings and training activities throughout the Americas. In the field of rights of persons with disabilities, civil society organizations have made innovative use of open-source forums to promote concept of a convention to promote and protect the rights of persons with disabilities. The online forum was established in connection with preparations for an interregional meeting of experts on a comprehensive and integral international convention to promote and protect the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities (Mexico City, 11-14 June 2002). The results of the online dialogue provided input to the meeting of experts, hosted by the Government of Mexico, as well as background for consideration by the first session of the Ad Hoc Committee established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 56/168 to consider proposals for a comprehensive and integral convention on the rights of persons with disabilities. The Red LatinoAmericana and the convention on disability forum are important examples of how accessible information technologies provide open and democratic means for interested parties to exchange knowledge and experience and plan joint action to pursue shared goals and objectives.

Notes

[1] *Report of the International Conference on Financing for Development, Monterrey, Mexico, 18-22 March 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.II.A.7), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[2] *Report of the Second World Assembly on Ageing, Madrid, 8-12 April 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.02.IV.4), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[3] *Report of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, 26 August-4 September 2002* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.03.II.A.1), chap. I, resolution 2, annex.

[4] In its resolution 1997/19, the Economic and Social Council decided to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for a further period of three years.

[5] In its resolution 2000/10, the Economic and Social Council decided to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur for a further period through the year 2002.

[6] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1998, Supplement No. 3* (E/1998/23).

[7] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2000, Supplement No. 3* (E/2000/23).

[8] See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 1995, Supplement No. 3* (E/1995/22), annex IV.

[9] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.01.XVII.15.

[10] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.XVII.4.

[11] United Nations publication, Sales No. E.98.XVII.8.

[12] Geneva, 2001.

[13] In the ICF model, a person's functioning or disability is conceived as a dynamic interaction between health conditions and environmental and personal factors. Functioning and disability are both multidimensional concepts. Disability is the umbrella term for any or all of an impairment of body structure or function, a limitation in activities, or a restriction in participation; see Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Disability Data Briefing: The International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF)*, Occasional Series, No. 20 (June 2002).

[14] Since its twenty-ninth session, in February 1997, the Statistical Commission has discussed the work of the city groups, reviewed accomplishments of existing groups and examined the terms of reference for proposed new groups.

[15] http://unstats.un.org/unsd/disability/.

[16] A systematic appraisal of the dimensions of accessibility is presented in Scott Campbell Brown, "Methodoligical paradigms that shape disability research", chapter 5 in Gary L. Albrecht, Katherine D. Seelman and Michael Bury, eds., *Handbook of Disability Studies* (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2001); the first six of the seven dimensions of accessibility considered at the meeting are derived from World Health Organization, *International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps: A Manual of Classification Relating to the Consequences of Disease* (Geneva, 1980).

[17] Additional information on building national capacities to promote and monitor implementation of the Standard Rules is presented in the Note of the Secretary-General to the report on the second mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Disability (E/CN.5/2000/3) <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/disecn003e0.htm>.

[18] The Fund was established pursuant to General Assembly resolution 32/133, in connection with preparations for the 1981 International Year of Disabled Persons. The General Assembly decided, in its resolution 40/31, that the Fund would be renamed the Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons (1983-1992), and that its resources would support catalytic and innovative action to further implement the Programme of Action. By its resolution 47/88, the Assembly decided that the Fund would continue in the period beyond the Decade as the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability.

[19] See Tom Peters, *The Circle of Innovation* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1998).

[20] Support for research and drafting of the plan was assisted in part by a grant from the Voluntary Fund on Disability to the African Rehabilitation Institute; the grant also supported participation by representatives of Africa regional organizations of persons with disabilities at the conference.

[21] The United Nations, represented by the United Nations Voluntary Fund on Disability, co-financed the drafting of the action plan and participation by representatives of regional African organizations of persons with disabilities at the February 2002 pan-African conference; the International Labour Organization, represented by its African Regional Office, assisted the African Rehabilitation Institute in organizing the conference; and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and WHO supported participants at the conference. In connection with the OMEGA initiative to promote social and economic integration of persons with disabilities in Africa, the United States Agency for International Development is providing support for private voluntary organizations to implement and expand rehabilitation services for civilian victims of war and other people with disabilities in Africa.